

Message Text

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SUBJECT: BELGIUM DEFERS ADHERENCE TO IEA

REF: BRUSSELS 05289

SUMMARY: TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT DEFERS LEGISLATION APPROVING BELGIUM'S ADHERENCE TO IEA UNTIL AUTUMN SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. REASON FOR DELAY IS THAT FRANCOPHONE MILITANTS MANAGED TO POSE ISSUE AS A "COMMUNITIES" QUESTION AS OCCURRED IN F-104 REPLACEMENT DECISION. GOVERNMENT DECIDED THAT ANOTHER KNOCKDOWN BATTLE ON FLEMISH-FRANCOPHONE FRONT WAS UNWISE AND UNNECESSARY NOW. END SUMMARY.

1. JUNE 18 CALENDAR OF CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES CARRIED AS ITEM OF BUSINESS CONSIDERATION OF A BILL TO APPROVE BELGIUM'S MEMBERSHIP IN IEA. WHEN TIME CAME, CHAMBER PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THAT AT REQUEST OF FOREIGN MINISTER BILL HAD BEEN LAID ASIDE FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION. WE CONFIRMED SUBSEQUENTLY THAT BILL HAS BEEN PIGEON-HOLED UNTIL AUTUMN SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, SPECIFICALLY UNTIL OCTOBER.

2. AUTHORITATIVE FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE GAVE US FOLLOWING BACKGROUND TO THIS ALMOST TOTALLY UNPUBLICIZED NON-EVENT:
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AS IN F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE (REFTEL), FRANCOPHONE POLITICAL

INTERESTS DECIDED TO MAKE IEA ADHERENCE A "COMMUNITIES ISSUE" WITH A VOTE AGAINST THE IEA BILL DEFINED AS A VOTE FOR FRANCE, FOR EUROPE AND AGAINST AMERICAN HEGEMONY. THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT HAD THE CLOUT TO PREVAIL IN A SHOWDOWN, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE, AS IT DID IN AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT CASE. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER TOOK ACCOUNT OF THE POLITICAL COST OF BRINGING THE RE-ASSEMBLEMENT WALLOON HUMILIATINGLY TO HEEL FOR SECOND TIME IN A FORTNIGHT. HE DECIDED THAT SPEEDY ADHERENCE TO IEA WAS NOT ALL THAT URGENT. ANYHOW, SENATE WAS UNLIKELY TO GET AROUND TO APPROVING THE LEGISLATION BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES FOR THE SUMMER ABOUT JULY 15.

3. A WALLOON SOCIALIST DEPUTY (DEHOUSSE), MILITANTLY OPPOSED TO IEA ADHERENCE FOR THE REASONS CITED ABOVE, GAVE US A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT VERSION. TINDEMANS, HE SAID, DID NOT HAVE THE VOTES TO PASS THE BILL ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 18. HE SAID THERE WERE FRANCOPHONE MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT COALITION DETERMINED NOT TO BE DRAGGED ALONG BY FLEMINGS A SECOND TIME. DEHOUSSE CONCEDED HIS OWN BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY WAS SIMILARLY POLARIZED. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A STRUGGLE TO IMPOSE PARTY DISCIPLINE ON FLEMISH SOCIALIST DEPUTIES HAD BILL COME TO A VOTE, HE SAID. HE SWORE THAT BELGIUM'S FRANCOPHONES, WITH WALLOON SOCIALISTS TAKING THE LEAD, WILL FIGHT IEA ADHERENCE ON SAME GROUNDS WHEN IT COMES UP AGAIN IN AUTUMN.

COMMENT: THAT TWO MAJOR ISSUES, NORMALLY TO BE CONSIDERED SOLELY ON BASIS OF BELGIUM'S NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS HAVE BEEN "COMMUNITIZED" THIS SPRING IS AN OMINOUS DEVELOPMENT. DEHOUSSE, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF MILITANT FRANCOPHONES, READILY CONCEDES THAT SUCH TACTICS ARE NOT BEST WAY TO BRING ABOUT RATIONAL DECISIONS OF NATIONAL POLICY. EQUALLY READILY, HE ASSERTS THAT LEVERAGE THUS ACQUIRED BY ADVOCATES OF A FEDERATED BELGIUM IS TOO USEFUL TO PASS UP. DEHOUSSE DOES NOT SPEAK FOR ALL FRENCH-SPEAKING SOCIALISTS. NEITHER, AS JUNE EVENTS DEMONSTRATE, ARE SUCH MILITANTS ISOLATED AND ALONE. RENNER

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